



Al-Risala 1985

September

Editorial

Al-Arabi magazine, Kuwait, in its publication of June 1985, has published a report entitled "Abdur Rahman Ad-Dakhil returns to Spain". Abdur Rahman Ad-Dakhil being an Umayyad prince was the first person to establish Muslim rule in Spain. The empire he founded lasted for nearly 800 years. The Spanish people subsequently rose in revolt against the Muslims, who, one by one, were extirpated from Spain, either fleeing or being killed.

This hatred for the Muslims lasted for centuries. But 1985 has turned a new page in Spanish history. Al-Munekar, a coastal city of Spain, has just celebrated the eighth centenary of Abdur Rahman Ad-Dakhil on a truly grand scale, presided over by the Queen of Spain. Al-Munekar is the place where he first set foot in the land of Spain. A tall life-size statue has been erected there, which depicts him surveying the area; sword in hand.

This event marks a great new revolution. In the olden days the Spanish were consumed by communal prejudice, and this being so, the period of Muslim rule in Spain was seen as one of usurpation and, therefore, as an object of hatred. But the modern age is one of historical approach, and such things, no longer seen from this prejudiced angle, far from being the subject of vilification have become a distinguished part of the history of Spain.

What prejudice had rejected, realism has resurrected.

2 September 1985

Unadulterated truth is more than people can bear

After the Prophet had received the first revelation, he returned home. He told Khadija, his wife, that he felt as if he was going to die. Khadija told him to see her relative Warqa Ibn Naufal, a convert to Christianity who was well-versed in Biblical history. When he had heard the whole story he addressed the Prophet: "By the One who has power over my soul you are God's messenger to your people. You have been visited by the very same angel who visited Moses. You will be denied by your own people. They will persecute you, expel you and fight with you." "Will they really expel me?" the Prophet exclaimed. "Indeed," replied Naufal. "Anyone who has preached the message that you have been sent with has met with the opposition and hostility of his people."

Hajj and the Call to Islam

With the advent of the final prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and God's blessings, the Ka'bah at Mecca replaced Jerusalem's Sacred Mosque as the centre of divine guidance (The Quran 2:142). The pilgrimage to Mecca is in a sense an annual assembly of those committed to the Islamic cause. From every corner of the globe pilgrims converge on the holy mosque to strengthen their relationship with God and foster unity amongst one another. By symbolic repetition of various stages in the life of the greatest exponent of the truth, Abraham, may peace be upon him, they express their determination to emulate him at any cost.

History of Hajj

Abraham was born eleven generations after Noah. God caused a tradition of guidance to ensue from him and chose him for raising a new nation, imbued with a spirit of righteousness, which might assist the final prophet in the accomplishment of his mission (The Quran 2: 124). The mission of other prophets involved no more than full conveyance of the message entrusted to them. The prophet with whom the chain of prophethood was to end, however, had to fulfill one more duty: that of establishing the dominance of the true religion on earth (The Quran 48:28). Only then could the preservation of the last divine scripture to be revealed to man be ensured; possibility of its being destroyed would be eliminated for all time (The Quran 48:28). Other prophets were sent to preach the true religion, but the final prophet was enjoined to establish its supremacy as well.

For this purpose a group of companions was required consisting of people endowed with the highest human qualities, fit to assist the prophet in implementing the divine scheme. Abraham, in bringing his wife Hajra and son Ismail to the uncultivated desert town of ancient Mecca and settling there, was laying the foundations for such a community. There, far from civilization, in simple, natural surroundings, a people would emerge from Abraham's progeny who were imbued with the highest human qualities; who would view things with clear and objective vision; whose actions would conform to their words; who would be ready to lay down their lives and properties for something they knew to be true. A people as firm as the mountains which surrounded them, as boundless as the vast desert in which they roamed. When this "finest community" had been raised from the barrenness of the desert, God sent the messenger among them for whom Abraham had prayed at the time of the construction of the Ka'bah.

God had willed the birth of a prophet to Abraham's wife Sarah. This prophet-son was born during Abraham's lifetime, and was called Isaac. It took two thousand years for the prayer of Abraham that a prophet be sent among Ismail's progeny, to be realized. Both prophets were destined to fulfill very different historical functions, hence the difference in the timing of their appearance on earth.

The final prophet needed an alert, vital community, fit to play the part allotted to them by God. The formation of this community took over two thousands years. When his people were ready to receive him, the prophet Muhammad was born amongst them, in accordance with the divine scheme. However, the prophetic mission had to continue during this long lapse in time. So it was arranged that prophets be sent continuously in the house of Jacob. Successive prophets continued to spread the word of God among man until the time of the coming of the final prophet approached, and the need for them no longer existed.

According to this scheme Abraham left his homeland, Iraq. He settled one wife, Sarah, in Palestine, where she gave birth to Isaac. His second wife, Hajra, and his son remained in Mecca where they assisted in the construction of the Ka'bah. The divine scheme for universal guidance was thus divided into two stages: an initial one in Palestine and a final one in Hijaz.

After Abraham, Palestine became the first centre of divine guidance. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, John, Jesus and many other prophets were born in its vicinity. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, was also known as Israel, and his progeny were known as the Israelites. Finally set in amongst the Israelites and they failed to mend their ways in spite of repeated solicitations by God's messengers. Then God deposed them from their position as bearers of divine guidance and the sacred office was transferred to the other branch of the house of Abraham, the Ismailites. The decline of the Israelites coincided exactly with the full development, after a process of two thousand years, of the Ismailites as a people of sufficient energy and dynamism to take on the responsibilities of being God's standard-bearers on earth. As an outward sign of this transference of responsibility, the direction of worship was altered. All prophets after Abraham had prayed towards Jerusalem. Now the Muslims were commanded to face Mecca instead.

Hajj – a Missionary Function

Hajj is – a repetition of Abrahamic history. By symbolically recapitulating various stages of Abraham's mission of Dawa, or call to the true religion, pilgrims make a covenant with God that they will devote themselves, in the true spirit of Abraham, to this same divine mission. They pledge to maintain this great prophetic tradition even after the termination of prophethood.

Abraham's departure from his homeland was part of a divine plan for the propagation of the word of God. Pilgrims also leave their homes, thereby signifying their readiness to forsake home and country for their faith. Abraham resigned himself to a simple life. Pilgrims also, by wearing the plain, seamless garments of Ihram which are donned during the performance of Hajj, show their readiness to make do with the bare necessities of life and concentrate on the real end which lies before them. By circumambulating the Ka'bah, Abraham confirmed his faithfulness to God. Pilgrims repeat this action and, in so doing, pledge fidelity and servility to God. While engaged in the service of God, Abraham's family ran between the hills of Safa and Marwa, scouring the land for water. Pilgrims also run between the same two hills, asserting thereby that they are ready to go to any lengths in the service of God, even

if their families have to endure the same hardships that Hajra and her family faced so courageously. Satan tried to make Abraham stray from his path of divine service and Abraham pelted him with stones. Pilgrims also fling pebbles at symbolic devils, thereby indicating their intention to deal with the real devil in like manner should he try to lead them astray. Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son for the sake of God. In the same way pilgrims, by sacrificing an animal, show their willingness to undergo any form of self-sacrifice for their faith. Abraham's mission of Dawa was concerned with making people aware of the hereafter. Pilgrims also assemble in the plain of Arafat to remember the life after death, so that this most poignant of realities may become an integral part of their thinking and that they may be able to make others pay due heed to it. Abraham answered every call of God. In like manner pilgrims recite continuously, "I am present before You, Lord, I am present before You. None has any share in Your sublimity. All praise and blessings are Yours, Yours and Yours alone, and all power and dominion belong to You." With these words pilgrims declare their constant readiness to respond to the call of God.

The Ka'bah is, then, the centre of the Islamic message and Hajj is an annual gathering of those committed to the task of dissemination of this message. The actions performed during Hajj serve as clear reminders of the life of Abraham and his dedication to Dawa. The rites of pilgrimage symbolically recapitulate events that, directly or indirectly, marked various stages in his efforts. Pilgrims should not only commemorate these events, but should follow Abraham's example and devote themselves to the call of Islam.

It is clear from the life of Abraham that the events commemorated during Hajj were an essential part of his life of Dawa, epochs in his communication of the faith. Nowadays, however, Hajj has been reduced to little more than an annual religious ritual. If the Dawa spirit were to be rekindled in the Muslim's hearts, and they were to become aware of their responsibilities in this field, the gathering of Hajj would automatically become an annual Dawa conference, thus assuming an important role in the task of conveying the Islamic message. But if the spirit of Islam and the zeal to disseminate it are lacking as they are today, the rituals lose their inherent meaning and take on moribund form. Pilgrims continue to pelt symbolic devils with stones, but the devils which truly exist in their own lives remain untouched. Their actions only concern symbols and never penetrate to the meanings which these symbols signify.

6 September 1985

Look Before you Leap

In a daring escape from the Sydney (Australia) jail, a prisoner climbed underneath the hood of a truck. At the truck's next step, he clambered out and found himself in the yard of another prison 6.5 kilometers from the first (UPI).

The obsession with the thought of managing an escape from the prison's miserable life so dominated his mind that when he saw a truck passing by he took it for granted that it would release him from his confinement.

This goes to show how the steps we take sometimes lead us further away from our destination, or simply lead us nowhere at all.

To turn life's journey into a success, a traveler must find the right conveyance. In this world, everyone requires some means or conveyance, so to speak, to achieve his goal. But it is necessary for one to inquire into the destination before one boards the conveyance. Leaps at random do not serve the purpose. If one misses the right 'conveyance' one is likely to meet the fate of the Australian prisoner – arriving at one jail from another.

Muhammad: The Prophet of Islam

Part I, Chapter V (contd.)

Shortly before the Battle of Badr (2AH), the Quraish sent a huge caravan of merchandise, along with sixty men, to Syria. Although the Quraish were defeated at Badr, their commander, Abu Sufyan, successfully managed to steer this caravan, in which the people of Mecca had placed all their capital, home to Mecca by a coastal route. Defeat at Badr left the Quraish thirsty for revenge, and their leaders met in Darul Nadwa (The Hall of Convention), where it was unanimously decided that the partners in the caravan should take their capital only, leaving the profits to be devoted to preparations for war against Mohammad and his followers. The profits amounted to 50,000 dinars, a huge sum in those days. The Quraish made elaborate preparations, and in 3AH advanced on Medina.

It was then that the Battle of Uhud took place. When news of the Quraish's advance reached the Prophet, he called his companions together. Most of them were inclined to meet the attack from within the city. The youthful element among them, however, were strongly opposed to this. If we remain in the city, they contended, then the enemy will interpret it as a sign of cowardice and weakness: the fight should be taken to them, outside the city. Abdullah Ibn Ubayy concurred with the opinion of the leading companions. (*Seerat Ibn Hisham*, Vol III, p7)

There was good ground for the view that the attack should be met from within the city. The geography of Medina had all the makings of a natural defence system. To the south were orchards of date-palms, so thickly clustered as to make an attack impossible from that side. To the east and west high mountains provided a natural barrier to any invader. There was only one front, then, from which Medina could be attacked. The city itself was a natural fortress. To leave it amounted to exposing oneself to enemy attack on all four sides, whereas from within the city there was only one front that would have to be defended. Medina's favourable location was taken advantage of in the Battle of the Trench, in which the entire city was protected by the digging of a trench on the open front to the north-west of the town.

Although most of the leading companions, and Abdullah Ibn Ubayy, were in favour of meeting the attack from within the city, the Prophet decided to accede to the wishes of the young Muslims: along with an army of one thousand, he left the city and set off for Uhud. Abdullah Ibn Ubayy was deeply offended to find that his, obviously wise and proper advice, had been overruled. With a heavy heart, he went along with the army. The Muslims had not yet reached Uhud when he, along with 300 followers, turned back. "He agreed with them and not with me," Abdullah Ibn Ubayy complained, "so I don't see why we should destroy ourselves on this field of battle." (*Seerat Ibn Hisham*, Vol III, p 8)

The Muslims' defeat at Uhud vindicated the opinion of those who had been in favour of meeting the attack from within the city. Accordingly, this strategy was duly adopted at the Battle of the Trench

(SAH). But still all the leading companions of the Prophet forgot their disagreement and remained in the Muslim army. Despite incurring heavy losses from having to bear the brunt of the battle, they fought valiantly alongside the Prophet. Only Abdullah Ibn Ubayy separated himself from the Muslim force, and for this reason he became known as the “Leader of the Hypocrites”. In principle, Abdullah Ibn Ubayy’s opinion was correct; it was also born out by experience on the field of battle; but, although he was in the right, his disobedience incurred God’s displeasure, and was a form of transgression.

Islam attaches great importance to consultation. Everyone has a right to put forward his or her point of view. But no policy can be effectively pursued if everyone expects his view to prevail no matter what the circumstances. One course has to be followed, so when there is disagreement over what that course should be, not everybody’s view can be accommodated. A true Muslim, then, should, after offering his opinion, forget about what he thinks, and follow the directives of decision-makers as if their decision was his own.

There is no greater sacrifice than that of one’s own opinion. Like a building, which can only be constructed if a considerable number of bricks are buried in the ground, so a strong society can only come into being if individuals are ready to bury their own personal opinions – to act in unity with others despite their disagreement. This is the only foundation on which a community of individuals can be formed; it is as necessary to the foundation of human society as bricks are to the foundation of a building.

8 September 1985

To bear With controversy is a sign of knowledge

Sa'eed Ibn Abi Arooba said that the one who does not listen to others' difference of opinion is not to be counted as a learned man.

Losing in Order to Gain

Five years ago, Ian Kirby, 20, of Hind head in the south of England, went blind with a rare disease of the eyes. Doctors told him that he would never see again.

Then, just before Christmas 1984, he went into hospital to have two wisdom teeth removed. He awoke from the operation and astonished doctors by saying that he could see. Lights were appearing through bandages around his head. The London *Daily Mail* reported Kirby's excitement in the following words: "As he regained consciousness Kirby shouted excitedly to nurses that he could see for the first time in five years." (*The Muslim*, Islamabad, January 5, 1985). Doctors said that it was probably the effects of the anesthetic that had restored his sight.

Ian Kirby went blind in the physical sense. The eyes of his body lost their vision. But everyone in this world goes blind in another more important way. They lose their spiritual vision. The eyes on their soul which provide a clear picture of reality cease to function correctly, and the picture becomes blurred, or obscured absolutely.

Yet we are all able to regain spiritual sight, just as Ian Kirby regained his physical sight. There always remains a likelihood that our vision of reality will be restored, and we will be able to set our lives in accordance with it. But this cannot be done without sacrifices being made.

Ian Kirby went into hospital to have an operation for the removal of his teeth. It seemed that he was only losing, but in fact he made an enormous gain: the operation led, unexpectedly, to his sight being restored. Likewise, if we all are to regain our spiritual vision in this world, we have to go through painful operations: we have to cut love of the world of our hearts; we have to resign ourselves to forgoing relationships and attachments that we hold dearest. It will seem that we are committing ourselves to unrelenting loss. Then, when there is nothing left in our minds to cast a veil over the reality, we will find that the loss we incurred was petty compared to the gain that has been made: we have lost the world of transition, but gained the world of eternity; we have lost illusion and gained reality; we have lost a couple of "teeth", but regained our ability to see things as they really are.

The Perfect Machine

In early January, 1985, a Soviet cruise missile, capable of carrying a nuclear warhead with a 350 kiloton yield, skimmed low over the outskirts of Murmansk, roared on over the Pasvik valley of north Norway and finally crashed into Lake Inari in Finland. The missile appears to have been fired from the Barents Sea. It is normal for the Russians to test missiles there, but they are usually fired in a north-east direction in order to avoid inhabited terrain. This one was fired south-west by mistake. The Norwegian government lodged a strong protest with the Soviets, while making clear that they did not suspect the latter of deliberate provocation, and realized that the missile had erred from its course by mistake.

Commenting on the incident, David Fairhall, defence correspondent of *The Guardian* newspaper, wrote that the fault was assumed to lie with electronic failure and human error. "The first lesson to be drawn from the incident ... is that all complex military weapons systems sometimes go wrong. We ought to appreciate this by analogy with everyday experience. Television sets go on the blink. Expensive motor cars break down. Ships stuffed with advanced navigational equipment collide. Or to put it in a conventional military setting, the commander of an air force base would reckon he was doing well enough in peacetime if three quarters of his aircraft were fully serviceable.... The truth, as some embarrassed Soviet naval captain has just reminded us, is that guided missiles, like television sets, cannot always be expected to work properly.

If our everyday experience tells us how imperfect machines designed by man are, it also shows us that there is another machine which functions absolutely perfectly. That is the machine of the universe, which God has put to our service. The universe is a machine more complex and grand than any other. Yet it never goes wrong. It can always be counted upon to work properly. So much so, in fact, that we have come to take its perfection for granted, and fail to sit up and take notice at the consistent and regular performance that it displays.

Stars revolve, but they do not collide with one another. The sun shines, but it never goes on the blink. Seasons continue their journey never wavering in the course. We see all this and depend upon it for our livelihood; yet we fail to wonder at its perfection, or consider its implications.

Machines constructed by man go wrong from time to time. This is because man is imperfect and so are the objects that he creates and operates. But the cosmic machine, which man has not created, and which lies beyond his control, functions perfectly. This shows that there must be a Perfect Power behind it. Human machines fly in a totally wrong direction when the person operating them shows the slightest negligence. It is inconceivable; therefore, that there should be no one watching over the cosmic machine, or that the Power who controls it should be of the slightest negligence. If this was the case heavenly bodies, like human missiles, would fail to keep to their course. The universe would be an arena of confusion and disarray, far removed from the perfect and harmonious orders we perceive in it today.

The Helplessness of Man

The coastal area of Bangladesh is a conglomeration of a number of small islands. Often the coasts are hit by severe cyclonic storms which cause heavy loss of life and property. In 1876 one such storm claimed the lives of 3 lakh people, besides causing incalculable loss in terms of property.

In May 1985 another severe storm hit about one thousand islands at the speed of 150 km. p.h. Four meter high sea waves engulfed the islands in its wake. About one lakh people succumbed to it and perished. Hundreds of settlements were washed away like so much straw. In the words of an English newspaper reporter, (29 May 1985), what hit the islands were:

“... murderous cyclones which expose man’s helplessness before nature’s fury.”

Such events remind man of the powerfulness of God and the helplessness of man. That is the real situation. The messengers of God proclaim this reality in words whereas nature gives a practical demonstration of it. Wise are those who pay heed to both the warning of men and the cataclysms of nature, and realize that the road to salvation is total submission to God’s will.

Progress and Feminism

In Japan about 15 million women are employed in outside – their homes-jobs in offices and factories. Far from enjoying an equal position with their male counterparts, they serve as helpers and subordinates.

Two Japanese women have recently been elected to the cabinet, but only thanks to Women's Year which will come to an end in 1985. Of the 608 diplomats in Japan, only twelve are women. Even to this day Japan's society is basically a male-dominated one. This is what the present woman minister said in the report:

"A bill, yet to be passed by the parliament, on ending discrimination against women, is considered by many of its male critics as reverse discriminatory."

Those who subscribe to the view that a nation will fail to march ahead without the participation of women who constitute almost half of the population need to make a reappraisal of their ideas. There is no doubt about it that Japan is rated as one of the most developed nations of the modern world, but all its developments have taken place without women's involvement as equals in non-domestic activities.

In olden times the spheres of men's and women's activities were considered separate. In modern times, however, this demarcation has been cast aside, and the argument put forward that a nation cannot progress if women are not offered equal opportunities to share in the building of it. But the experiment of giving women a free hand has shown that the abolition of the ancient system of the division of labour has not contributed to progress to any significant degree. In the countries where women have already been offered equal opportunities in every field, even there, in practice, all important, advanced fields are dominated by men.

Japan's example has challenged the feminist view. Japan, in every sense of the word, is a developed country of the modern world, but its society is still male-dominated like those of ancient times. This proves that the development of a nation does not depend upon equal participation of women, as is held by militant feminists the world over.

People generally quarrel because they cannot argue.

G.K. Chesterton

Truth at all Costs

An American statesman, scientist and writer, Benjamin Franklin (1706-90), was known in his childhood to be a tactless fellow, yet in later years rose to the coveted post of ambassadorship, being appointed ambassador of America to France. His secret of success lay in his own words:

“I’ll speak ill of no man, and speak all the good I know of everybody.”

Man indeed loves nothing more than being praised and hates nothing more than being criticized.

A man of principle, however, upholds the truth, no matter what price has to be paid. In doing so he can become an object of scorn, or be treated as an outcast from society. But an unscrupulous person draws the crowd. The reason is quite simple. The former abides by the truth, at all costs. He does not mould himself to the wishes of the people, while, to the latter, it is expediency alone which counts. His aim is to earn the good will of the people so he moulds himself into what they want him to be.

To pass on to others something one does not believe in; to present falsehood as truth for the sake of consolidating one’s hold on people amounts to hypocrisy. One so inclined is very likely to achieve success in this world, but will be cast aside in the next world, where truth and untruth will become as clearly separated from each other as day is from night.

There is a great difference between a preacher, the ambassador of God, and an ambassador who is appointed by worldly governments. The former himself sets out to please God while the latter is appointed to please the people. The latter sets his eyes on expediency, on worldly gain, while the former sets his eyes on truth, however dear it might, cost him.

A mature person is one who does not think only in absolutes, who is able to be objective even when deeply stirred emotionally, who has learned that there is both good and bad in all people and in all things. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Uncomplaining Endurance

The Mughal Prince, Aurangzeb, came into conflict with his father, Shahjahan, over certain political matters. He, therefore, dethroned Shahjahan and imprisoned him in the fort at Agra in 1658, where he was kept in close confinement and deprived of even the common necessities of life. He could only while away his time by contemplating the Taj Mahal from the fort and reciting poems.

"An Advanced History of India", compiled by Dr. R.C. Majumdar, Dr. H.C. Raychaudhuri and Dr. Kalinkar Dutta describes the final days of Shahjahan in these words:

"He found solace in religion, and, in a spirit of resignation, passed his last days in prayer and meditation in the company of his pious daughter, Jahanara, till at last death ... relieved him of all his miseries (p.477).

It is said that Shahjahan, weary of this life of confinement, conveyed to the Aurangzeb this message in the form of a verse:

'Kill us or pay us or set us free.'

Aurangzeb sent another verse in reply:

'When the wise bird is caught in a net it should remain patient.'

This might be a fiction rather than fact. There is, however, a lesson to be learnt from this. Sometimes, by accident, or due to some mistake one is enmeshed in circumstances which are unbearable and from which it is not possible to extricate itself. It is foolish in such situations to take action on impulse without considering the consequences. Just as when a bird is caught in a net, the more it flutters its wings, the more it enmeshes itself. Likewise, when in such a situation, if one loses patience, one becomes more and more entangled. This is true both for individual and for nations.

14 September 1985

Criticizing without quarrelling

Taoos and Wahb Ibn Munabbah met on one occasion. Taoos said to Munabbah that he had heard a very grave matter concerning him. "What is it," Munabbah asked. "That you say that it was none other than God who made the people of Sodom and Gomorrah indulge in their evil ways." "God forbid," Munabbah replied. Then they were silent. They did not argue with one another.

15 September 1985

Death the Leveler

An Air India plane, a Boeing 747, took off from Montreal on 23 June 1985, carrying 329 people aboard including the crew. It was bound for Delhi via London.

At Palam airport, Delhi, large numbers of people were waiting, as usual, to receive their relatives and friends. Some of the passengers were coming back home after working hard at their studies or their business. There were some girls and boys who were coming to India to get married. Still others were to visit their homeland after a long interval to meet their near and dear ones.

Their happiness, however, suddenly turned into deep grief. While flying above the Atlantic, the plane met with an accident and plunged into the ocean off the coast of Ireland. When the list of the dead was put up on the board the people waiting for them rushed towards it. At this moment, a reporter of the *Hindustan Times* (24 June 1985) captures the scene in these words:

“In their moment of stunned disbelief, each thought ‘this could not be happening to me.’ But with merciless equality the death list shattered all their hopes”.

Leaving aside such major tragedies, it is a fact of life that every day a number of people pass away from this world in the ordinary course of events. This fact on its own should be enough to shake people up, but it does not, for the simple reason that everyone who watches others disappear thinks that this fate is only destined for others, and not for himself. This is a strange but observable fact of human psychology. By excluding himself he fails to learn a valuable lesson. He fails to hear the message of death even when it is close at hand.

One day when Booker T. Washington, the famous American Negro educator, was in haste to catch a train, he hurried to a horse-stand and asked the driver of a cab to take him to the station. “No,” replied the driver. “I’ve never driven a black man, and I never will.”

“All right, friend” retorted Booker Washington cheerily. “Just hop into the back seat and I’ll do the driving.”

The astonished cabby did as he was bidden, and Washington caught his train.

(Jacob M. Braude)

When the Rot Sets In

A “Maulvi” from Afghanistan went on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1980. On his return he complained to some friends about how corrupted the Arabic language had become. As an example, he cited the word “Thalatha”, which means three. The word, in Afghanistan and other Asian countries, is pronounced “Salasa”. This is a corrupted form of the original Arabic pronunciation which has developed in Asian countries because people there have difficulty pronouncing the letter “Tha” which occurs twice in the word “Thalatha”: Asians have now become so accustomed to saying “Salasa” instead of “Thalatha” that they have come to think that their pronunciation is the correct one. The Arabs, they say, do not know how to speak their own language. So it was with this Maulvi. “Everyone there says ‘Thalatha’ instead of ‘Salasa,’ he complained.

In this case it is the Asians, not the Arabs, who are guilty of semantic corruption. But Asians have become so used to their version of the letter “Tha” that is the Arabs they accuse of pronouncing it wrongly. “Sa” instead of “Tha” and “Salasa” instead of “Thalatha” have been passed down from one generation to the next for so many centuries that those who have inherited this method of pronouncing the letter cannot conceive of it being wrong. But it is.

Exactly the same thing has happened with religion. The prophet of Islam left his followers with an authentic divine scripture and a fully documented account of his life and teachings. After a time, however, people began to read things into the Book of God that were not there; they adopted customs which they traced to the prophet although in fact he had never practiced them; they developed creeds and dogmas which they claimed were an integral part of Islam, but which really had nothing to do with the religion revealed to the holy Prophet.

After a time these innovations became so firmly established in the mass mentality that whenever a person came to revive the true religion of Islam, and sought to bring people back to the path laid out by the Qur’an and the Prophet, he was condemned as trying to set up a new religion. In fact it is the religion they have invented that is new, for it has come into being – in the name of Islam – after the Prophet established the true Islamic way. But centuries have passed and they have come to think of their new religion as the old, original one; anyone who preaches the true, authentic, old religion of Islam is accused of inventing a “new” religion.

This is the same accusation as people in ancient times used to make against their prophets:

“We never heard of this in the former faith. It is nothing but a false invention” (Qur’an, 38:7).

But it was their accusation that was false, not message of the Prophets. For each prophet taught the same message as that of the Prophets who passed before him.

No Hands but no Thief

Once on a visit to the city of Medina, an Indian happened to come across an Arab, a bedouine by appearance, one of whose hands had been amputated. Because it was the practice to cut off thieves' hands in Saudi Arabia, it immediately occurred to the Indian that this man must have been a thief. He felt hesitant, therefore, to meet him, but made an effort – perhaps out of pity, or curiosity, or both – and went forward to greet his Arab brother. He learnt in the course of his conversation with him, that the Arab belonged to a town called Yutma. He owned a big farm with 23 tube wells. The produce of his farm was daily brought to the city market in Medina in large quantities. He further told his Indian brother that in 1948 he had joined the Palestinian war against the Jews, where he had received six bullets in his arm. He had to be hospitalized for a long time. In spite of the doctor's best efforts they failed to cure the wound. To save the arm, therefore, there was nothing for it but to cut off his hand.

This is an example which shows how jumping to conclusions on the basis of inadequate information can cause great misunderstandings. A freedom fighter and an honourable member of society had been taken for a thief and a criminal.

Every member of society should feel it an obligation to exercise his judgment with extreme caution before arriving at his conclusions. Thorough investigation should always precede the forming and offering of opinions.

Where this is impossible for any person, the only alternative is to keep silent. Speech is silver but silence is golden.

The Message of the Qur'an

Chapter II (contd.)

"Say: 'Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel?' For surely he has revealed it by God's will to your heart, a confirmation of what went before and a guidance and glad tidings to believers. Whoever is an enemy of God, of His angels and His apostles, of Gabriel and Michael shall make God Himself his enemy: God is the enemy of the unbelievers. We have sent down to you clear revelation: none will deny them except the evildoers. Whenever they make a covenant, must some of them cast it aside? Most of them do not believe. And now that an apostle has come to them from God confirming their own Scriptures, some of those to whom the Scriptures were given cast off the Book of God behind their backs, as though they knew nothing (2:97-101)."

Owing to their own rebelliousness the Jews were meted out severe punishments in ancient times. It was God's way to warn them of these punishments, and such warnings came to them through the prophets who were acting on the words of the Archangel Gabriel. The moral of these incidents was that people had to follow God's commandments; for if they persisted in a sinful life, they would be exposing themselves to His wrath. But, instead of heeding this lesson, the Jews came to regard Gabriel as their enemy, because it used to be he who gave prior warning through the prophets of their impending doom. Consequently, when the prophet Muhammad proclaimed that he was receiving his revelation through Gabriel, they said: "So, our old enemy Gabriel. That explains why the scriptures, the birth right of the Israelites, are being conveyed to a person belonging to another tribe."

To react with impunity in such a senseless manner is the result of leading an insincere life, free from all restrictions. The Jews had allowed self-interest, empty convention, and racial prejudice to dominate their lives. Religion had been adhered to only on a superficial level, just to keep up the pretence, that they were, in fact, faithfully treading the path of God. Those who make an outward show of following their religion are, inevitably, loath to accept the proclamation of true, unadulterated religion. Having built an edifice of national pride on the basis of religion, they cannot abide the message of pure humility that true religion conveys: they view it as a challenge to their worldly honour and status. That is why they fall into the habit of saying things which are correct enough in form, but totally bereft of any inner meaning. Obviously, angels do not hold grudges against ordinary mortals; they descend to earth only by divine command, and reveal the Scriptures to those prophets whom God Himself has chosen. In the face of clear proofs that the Arab prophet had received the same revelation received by Abraham, Moses and Jesus and that it was in accordance with the previous divine scriptures, there was no ground for their rejection of the message. People resort to religious terminology in order to prove their faith; whereas, in actual fact, hollow meaningless words have nothing to do with true faith and piety.

“And they follow what the devils tell of Solomon’s kingdom. Not that Solomon disbelieved; it is the devils who disbelieved, teaching men witchcraft. And (they follow) what was revealed to the angels, Harut and Marut, in Babylon. Yet they would never instruct any man without saying to him beforehand: ‘We have been sent to tempt you; do not disbelieve.’ From these two, they learn that by which they can create discord between husband and wife, although they can harm none with what they learn except by God’s leave. They learn, indeed, what harms them and does not profit them; yet they know full well that anyone who chose it would have no share in the life to come. Vile is that for which they have sold their souls, if they but knew it.’ Had they embraced the Faith and kept from evil far better for them would His reward have been, if they but knew it (2:102-103).”

Salvation in the Hereafter can only be achieved by virtue of righteous actions. It is when People of the Book seek to achieve it without actually doing anything to earn it that they go astray. The real aim of the Scriptures is to convey this message – to call on man to earn God’s blessings by leading a righteous life. As long as people maintain their moral and spiritual vitality they respond positively to this call, applying the teachings of the Scriptures to their practical lives. When they suffer a decline, however, they search for less exacting methods of earning salvation. It is easier, for instance, to write down a few verses of the Holy Scriptures, or recite them, than to actually practice their teachings. So that is what people tend to do. The Scriptures, which are meant to form a part of one’s life, are reduced to a kind of talismanic textbook – a talismanic – from which magical prescriptions are prepared and sorcerors’ spells cast. And they do not only see this as a way of reaching Heaven; they come to regard it as a path to worldly success also. Veneration of the souls of dead saints, for example, becomes a solution to all their problems. This mentality then finds expression on a social level. It serves as the very basis for a people’s efforts to achieve political and religious reform. What can only come from conscientious and committed struggle, they seek to obtain by magical schemes.

When superstition and apathy set in the declining Jewish race, some people exploited this tendency in order to make commercial capital, by providing them with magical prescriptions. To make their business flourish these unscrupulous profiteers attributed their art to Solomon, saying that the extraordinary powers he exercised over the spirits and winds were, in fact, based on his knowledge of magic, and claimed that this knowledge had been passed on to them by the spirits. This authority accounted in great measure for the rapid spread of sorcery, which soon developed into a highly popular art among the Jews.

When angels came to Lot’s people, who were practicing homosexuals, they came in the garb of handsome boys in order to test them. Similarly angels were sent to the Jews in Bablon in the garb of holy-men to teach them magic, at the same time making it quite clear that they were only putting the Jews to the test, this being a form of knowledge that should not be practised. But the Jews took no heed of this warning: they practised magic with great fervour and even used it for illicit ends.

Nemesis

Recently, in New Delhi, a school teacher, a Miss. Renu Saxena, had her gold chain snatched off her neck as she alighted from a bus in Greater Kailash. The culprit was twenty year-old Narain Das, an alleged criminal of some notoriety. Miss. Saxena immediately called out for help and two onlookers, Mr. Gyan Rakesh and Mr. Sanjay Dutt promptly gave chase to the thief and caught him.

To their astonishment, however, the chain could not be found on him. Everyone was bewildered. The police then took the youth into custody and he was sent to the AIIMS for an X-ray. To his dismay, X-ray report revealed the gold chain nestling inside his stomach. He had swallowed it for fear of being caught!

Such bizarre revelations, which are rarities in this world, will take place in the next world on a grand scale. In the present world, a veil is all too often cast over people's wrongdoing, but in the other world all veils will be lifted. Then everything that people had hidden behind them will come out into the open. All secrets will be laid bare.

Deception on All Sides

This is a world of deception and delusion. People are free to do one thing in reality, but make out that they are doing something quite different. They may be pursuing a policy of personal advancement and self-aggrandisement, but they use slogans which make it appear as though – far from serving themselves – they are only out to serve others. They make out that what they are doing is for the good of their nation, whereas in fact they themselves are the only beneficiaries of their policies. Everyone twists words to his own advantage, making the cruelty and injustice that he inflicts on others appear like justice and humanism. Those who have the law on their side have a license to act as they please: if the law sanctions their misdemeanours, then no one can say that what they are doing is wrong.

This is the way with people of the world. As for people who call themselves religious, the course that they follow is not very different. They have attached the label “religion” to a few lifeless dogmas; they have assigned the highest rewards to menial, mechanical rites and ceremonies; they make ritual religion appear like real religion; they give themselves credit for practicing religion, whereas in fact what they are practicing is religion made by man, not that revealed by God.

The “God” that they have invented for themselves is one that they do not need to fear. They have appointed for themselves a prophet who will intercede for them and save them from damnation, no matter how they act on earth. The afterlife that they claim to believe in is one where heaven is for them and hell for others. When they pray they are a picture of humility, but their prayer does not prevent them from being proud and malicious when they leave the house of worship. When they fast, they assiduously abstain from food and drink, but they do not bother to refrain from lying, deceit, and injustice. They have made religion a topic of argument and disputation, and have forgotten that religion is something to be practiced, not just to be talked about. Then, to crown it all, they claim that they are performing “missionary activity”, whereas in fact what they are doing is seeking to consolidate their own power and prestige.

But counterfeit gold is only considered gold until it has been put to the test of the touchstone. So it is with the deception that man practices in this world. It can only prevail until the Day of Reckoning comes to pass, when God’s truth will eliminate all falsehood and His justice will put an end to all injustice. Man is free in this world because he is being put to the test. He can do as he pleases as long as his trial period lasts. When it comes to an end, he will find himself absolutely powerless. He will want to speak, but words will desert him. He will want to run away, but his legs will not be able to carry him.

That will be the day of truth. On that day man will shed the camouflage which hides his real state in this world. Everyone will appear as he or she really is. What a revelation it will be when the pretences that people put on fade away, and reality comes to the fore. In this world only God knows a person’s true state; in the next world it will be plain for all to see. Ones who appeared in a certain light in this world will be exposed in a completely different light there: they will be exposed for what they were, rather than what they pretended to be.

22 September 1985

When loss turns to gain

Marc Chagall, a Russian-born commoner who became one of France's greatest painters, died in March 1985 at the age of 97. With meagre financial resources, he first arrived in Paris in 1910, returning to his native Russia at the beginning of World War I. He left Russia once again in 1922, passing through Berlin on his way back to Paris. While in Berlin, he found that hundreds of his paintings left there in 1914 had been stolen and sold. He was saddened until his arrival in the French capital, where he found that these works had made him a name in the art world.

22 September 1985

Opportunities for propagating the faith in the communist world as well

The Beijing Foundation is planning to turn Nuijie Street in the centre of the Chinese capital into a modern street with Chinese Muslim features. The street is home to more than 10,000 Muslims. There is a mosque more than 1000 years old situated there. It now houses the Chinese School of Islamic Theology, a hospital, a high school, a primary school and a kindergarten as well. "There will be a complete set of cultural and educational facilities, ethnic shops, Islamic hotels and other commercial services," said Zhang Shunzhi, Vice President of the Beijing Foundation. He also said that a new Islamic centre for religious activities was planned in the street, and that the state would help in the construction work.

The Prophet and His Companions

A blessing for one, a curse for another

The Prophet presented Hakim Ibn Hazam with something after the Battle of Hunayn. Hakim thought little of it, so the Prophet gave him something else besides. "Prophet of God," Hakim said, "which of your presents was better?" "The first one," the Prophet answered. "Money is sweet and attractive," the Prophet went on. "If one accepts it with magnanimity, and seeks to spend it correctly, then one is blessed in it. But one who takes it greedily, and spends it in an improper way, will not be blessed in it. He will be like one who eats, but is not replenished. And the hand that gives is better than the hand that takes." "Even if one takes from you, Prophet of God?" Hakim asked. "Yes, even from me," the Prophet answered.

Unselfishness in worldly matters

Younis Ibn Maisira said: "Moderation in the world does not consist of prohibiting lawful things, and wasting money. Moderation in the world is depending more on what is with God than on what is with oneself, and living in the same state whether suffering or not, and looking at those who praise you and those who criticize you equally where truth is concerned."

God requires heartfelt devotion on our part

Abdullah Ibn Jud'an was an idolater, but a noble Arab also. He died before the start of the Prophet's mission. In the time of ignorance, he performed many deeds that were commonly considered admirable. The Prophet was asked whether he would be rewarded for his good deeds. "He never uttered the words: 'God, forgive me,'" the Prophet answered.

Islamic revolutions are brought about by Islamic people

In the Battle of Badr, a brave idolater asked the Prophet's permission to join the Muslim army. His request was not granted. "Do you believe in God and His Prophet?" the Prophet asked him. No, "the man replied. I cannot accept help from an idolater," the Prophet told him. Afterwards, the man proclaimed the testimony of faith, and entered the field of battle as a Muslim.

Two eyes that will not see hell-fire

The Prophet said: "Two eyes will not be touched by hell-fire: the eye that cries for fear of God, and the eye that spends the night keeping watch for the cause of God."

To criticize is to point out mistakes, not to blame

Abdullah Ibn Umar stayed absolutely apart from all the civil strife that followed Ali's martyrdom. He used to say time and time again that he did not believe that it was right that Muslims should be spilling Muslims' blood. That, he said, was why he was staying aloof. No one had any doubt about Ibn Umar's sincerity piety and discernment, but some of his contemporaries blame him from one angle. "Why," they said to him, "do you not go out and fight in this "holy war?" "Because I don't think it is a holy war," Ibn Umar replied. "This is internal strife amongst the Muslims themselves, not holy war." But they were not satisfied with his answer. "We dismiss your opinion out of hand," they said. "It seems that you want the companions of the Prophet to die out fighting among themselves. Then, when no one besides you is left, your name will be put forward for leadership of the Muslims."

Seeking honour in this world causes disgrace in the next

Mu'awiya went out, and reached the spot where Abdullah Ibn Amir and Abdullah Ibn Zubair were sitting. When they saw Mu'awiya, Abdullah Ibn Amir rose to his feet, and Abdullah Ibn Zubair remained seated. Mu'awiya told them that the Prophet had said that whoever likes people to get up for him should prepare a place for himself in hell-fire.

Forsaking this world for the sake of the next

Some people from Iraq came to see Umar. When it was time for food, he brought them a big bowl containing whole wheat bread and olive oil, and asked them to eat. They started eating very slowly, and a little at a time. "I can see what you are doing, people of Iraq," Umar said to them. "You know, if I wanted, I could have lavish and luscious food like you have. But we leave over our portion of the world so that we may partake of it in the hereafter. Have you not heard what God said about a certain group of people? 'You squandered away your precious things in your earthly life.'"